

FITNESS

Exercise Regularly: A Healthy Habit for Healthy Aging

Exercise is probably the single most important thing you can do to age successfully. The benefits are seemingly endless and can include weight control, improved circulation of blood and oxygen, increased muscle mass, better mood and improved balance.

Even in moderate amounts, exercise can help you enjoy life and avoid diseases that many people mistakenly believe come automatically with age. You can reduce your risk of dying prematurely by almost half if you exercise every day or nearly every day. Regular physical activity cuts your risk of:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Osteoporosis
- Depression and anxiety
- Osteoarthritis
- Falls and broken bones
- Some types of cancer

Exercise can also enhance your mood and help you manage stress and sleep more soundly. The following are essential points to remember about exercising during middle age and beyond:

Consider a checkup first. See your doctor before starting a vigorous exercise program, particularly if you have a chronic health condition.

Start slowly. Start at a comfortable pace. Be sure to make stretching a part of your routine. When you feel stronger, gradually increase the amount or intensity of your exercise.

Enjoy your exercise. Pick something you enjoy doing and have fun. Vary your exercise program or include a friend to keep it exciting. Take your exercise outside if the weather is agreeable.

Aim for 30 minutes or more of exercise most days of the week. This can be done all at once or accumulated throughout the day. For example, a 10-minute walk in the morning, 10 minutes of climbing stairs in the afternoon and another 10-minute walk after dinner.

Be creative. Although certain conditions may prevent you from doing certain activities, almost everyone can participate in some form of physical activity. For example, if you have arthritis, you may do well with pool or water exercise. And exercise can include many common household chores and lifestyle activities, such as walking the dog, washing the car or raking the yard. Talk with your doctor about what will work best for you.

Pace yourself. If you're unable to talk while exercising, you're probably working too hard. You should be able to engage in conversation but breathing should not be difficult.

Know when to stop. Stop exercising and seek immediate care if you feel tightness in your chest, have severe shortness of breath, chest pain, pain in your arms or jaw, experience heart palpitations, dizziness or faintness.

